

**ISCKMC 2022****International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC  
AGENDA OF TURKEY (2012–2021)**Rustam Alkhazurovich Tovsultanov (a)\*, Malika Sharipovna Tovsultanova (b),  
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**Abstract**

Today, more than 3 million Syrian refugees live in Turkey. The country ranks first in the world in terms of the number of accepted refugees, in general, which poses a wide range of problems and tasks that require timely and effective solutions. This article analyzes the complexities of the process of socio-economic and ethno-cultural adaptation of internally displaced persons and possible prospects for their solution. The article examines the legal and foreign policy aspects of the status and situation of refugees, their place and role in Turkey's relations with the EU and their role in the Turkish domestic political agenda. As shown on concrete examples, the Turkish leadership uses the issue of refugees as an instrument of influence, forcing the West to put up with the growing foreign policy ambitions of the Turkish president. The increase in unemployment caused by the influx of Syrians and the ever-increasing expenses of the state budget for their maintenance undermine the popularity of the ruling party among Turkish voters. The Turkish leadership promises to solve the refugee problem as soon as possible, however, it does not offer truly effective methods. The rights of Syrian refugees in Turkey are limited, and war-torn Syria is not able to accept them all. The authors propose a method for improving the socio-economic situation of Syrian refugees through their involvement in the development of Turkish agriculture with the financial support of the EU. Turkish citizens should realize that a significant number of Syrians will remain in their country forever.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2011, the escalation of the civil war in Syria began, because of which about 7 million citizens left the country. Just over half of them have found shelter in neighboring Turkey. The situation of such a huge mass of displaced persons is certainly fraught with a huge number of problems. Legal and ethno-cultural problems are added to the socio-economic ones in Turkey. In particular, the legal basis for obtaining temporary protection status is set out in Law No. 2013/6458 *On Foreigners and International Protection*. At one time, in 1961, when adopting the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, the Turkish Foreign Ministry stated that it would accept refugees only from Europe, due to the instability of the Middle East region, to which Turkey adjoins. Consequently, persons arriving from the countries of the Near and Middle East are granted only temporary asylum. In this regard, they prefer to use the neutral word *guests* of Turkey to refer to Syrian refugees. It is unlikely that many of these *guests* will return to Syria in the foreseeable future. And it's not just about the ongoing conflict or their rejection of the Assad regime. A country ravaged by a decade-long war is simply unable to accept such a huge number of people and has nothing to offer them. In this situation, the Turkish leadership faces the question of possible methods of solving the problem of socio-economic integration of refugees.

## 2. Problem Statement

Turkey ranks first in the world in the number of accepted refugees. This creates serious problems for the socio-economic and political stability of the country and its population. From year to year, they accumulate among the refugees themselves: unemployment, problems of medical and school education, as well as constant stress generated by the lack of prospects for a speedy improvement of the situation. The leadership of the European Union, faced with a large-scale influx of Syrian refugees in 2012-2015, was interested in their return to Syria, or if possible, in their stay in Turkey, but makes very little effort to help in their maintenance. Under these conditions, the Government of the Republic of Turkey, which does not have sufficient resources to fully support the Syrians, faces an extremely difficult task of integrating them into the Turkish community, for which it has yet to create a legislative and economic framework.

## 3. Research Questions

In the 2010s, after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, faced with a huge influx of refugees and at the same time, striving to become an important actor in the intra-Syrian conflict, the Turkish leadership adopted a policy of open borders for all Syrians. In February 2021, their number reached 3638193 people (Ambrosetti, 2021). Thus, Turkey today ranks first in the world in terms of the number of refugees accepted by the country. Due to their huge numbers, the government of the country was forced to take several extraordinary measures, mitigating the conditions of their socio-economic integration in Turkey. Many of them have already adapted to Turkey and settled comfortably in it. However, access to the labor market is far from simple: a work permit can only be issued in the province in which a person enjoys temporary protection and where he was registered upon arrival in Turkey. Moreover, the share of Syrian workers in enterprises should not exceed 10% of all employees (Ineli-Ciger, 2018).

A few problems are caused by the very presence of large masses of the population in refugee camps. Among them is the lack of humanitarian aid. Turkey's economic opportunities to help all refugees are limited. In part, the problem is solved by the help of non-governmental organizations like Islamic charitable foundations.

There are also psychological problems in the camps related to living away from home and doubts about the possibilities for *self-realization* in Turkey. Over the past 10 years, this tension has often led to riots in refugee camps.

Along with socio-economic, this is the recruitment of refugees by Syrian opposition fighters, who could quite easily cross the border with the aim of camp residents. Among the recruiters, at least until the end of 2015, there were also agents of ISIS (an organization banned in Russia) (Szymanski, 2017). There are conflicts between refugees and the local population. In the province of Hatay, the indigenous people, many of whom are Alawites, that is, the co-religionists of Bashar al-Assad, during clashes with the Syrians called them *terrorists fighting against their own state* (Krivov & Gnezdova, 2018). Ethnocultural problems are taking over the territories of not only compact accommodation of refugee camps, but also large cities that are attractive to the masses of Syrians looking for work. Thus, more than 500 thousand refugees currently live in Istanbul. The Yusufpasha district became the place of their compact residence. Here, on Turgut Ozal Millet Avenue, there are almost no signs in Turkish, the inscriptions are mainly only in Arabic (Krivosheev & Suleymanov, 2017). Such a picture against the background of a high birth rate among refugees contributes to the growth of anti-Syrian, anti-Arab sentiments in the country. In Turkish social networks, one can often read arguments about the Syrian or Arab *threat*.

Many Syrian refugees work in the shadow sector, without an employment contract. In addition to the above quota, they are forced to do this by the language barrier, the high unemployment rate among the Turkish population proper, differences in qualifications and the tendency to tax evasion by employers. They often prefer cheap Syrian labor over Turkish. In addition, Syrian women often became victims of sexual violence, abduction and forced prostitution. Refugees are also systematically faced with problems of medical care. A separate range of problems is the issues of obtaining school education for refugee children and the training of Syrians in Turkish universities (Gül, 2016).

To solve the problems of internally displaced persons in a timely manner, a special Main Directorate for Migration Management was formed under the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2013. However, Turkey's own forces were clearly not enough to solve the refugee problem. In 2015, the Turkish government has already spent \$5 billion, of which only 3% was covered by contributions from other countries and UN agencies (Içduygu, 2015). Ankara has repeatedly stated that the humanitarian crisis and the refugee problem are the responsibility not only of Turkey, but also of the entire world community. At the end of 2015, the European Union, interested in resolving the migration crisis as soon as possible, began negotiations with the Republic of Turkey, and an Agreement on refugees was signed on March 18, 2016. From now on, any illegal migrant who came to Greece after March 20, 2016, was sent back to Turkey (Aliyeva, 2018).

The joint action plan on migration assumed EU financial assistance in the amount of 3 billion euros, accelerated process of cancellation of visa requirements for Turkish citizens in the Schengen area and intensification of negotiations on the accession of the Republic of Turkey to the European Union and

was agreed by the leaders of the European Union and Turkey on October 15, 2015, at the EU summit in Brussels. The Turkish side pledged to help protect the borders shared with the EU countries, improve the living conditions of refugees in the country, prevent the outflow of migrants to the EU from its territory and facilitate the procedures for the return of so-called *illegal immigrants* to their homeland (Todorova, 2017).

Speaking at the UN General Assembly in September 2019, Turkish President R.T. Erdogan noted that Turkey is a state whose activities are aimed at justice and fair settlement of problems in the international arena. Calling Turkey the most generous state in the world in the humanitarian sphere, the President stressed that it ranks first in the world in terms of the ratio of humanitarian aid to GDP (Irkhin & Moskalenko, 2021). At this stage, despite the EU's failure to fulfill most of its obligations, the Turkish government continues to fulfill its obligations, but it was not guided by abstract humanism at all. A striking example is R. Erdogan's statement during growing international criticism of Turkey's military operation against Syrian Kurdish militias: "Hey, the European Union! Pull yourself together. If you try to declare our operation an invasion, we will do the simplest thing: open the doors and send 3.6 million refugees to you" (Ambrosetti, 2021, p. 8). Thus, the issue of Syrian refugees becomes a real instrument of influence, forcing the West to put up with the growing ambitions of the Turkish president.

The more than ten-year stay of millions of refugees on its territory exacerbates economic and political tensions in Turkey. According to the Anadolu agency, as of April 2019, the Turkish authorities spent over \$30.2 billion on the needs of refugees. The Turks' dissatisfaction with the increase in government spending on the maintenance of refugees led to the defeat of the ruling Justice and Development Party in local elections. Sensitively reacting to the mood of the citizens of R. Erdogan changed his *compassionate Islamism* in his domestic political discourse to the principle of *Turkey first of all* and began to emphasize the need and possibility of the speedy return of refugees to Syria. President Erdogan said that they have created safe conditions in Jerablus, Rai, Dabiq and Al-Bab. More than 100 thousand of our Syrian brothers were able to return to their homes, and their number is growing day by day (Krivosheev & Suleymanov, 2017).

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

To consider the problems of refugees from the point of view of the Turks themselves, the position of the authorities and President Erdogan personally, and the prospects for the development and possible resolution of the situation.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The methodological basis of our research is the principles of historicism and comparativism, which allowed us to consider the problem of Syrian refugees in Turkey's foreign and domestic policy in 2012–2021, as well as to identify the difficulties of the process of socio-economic and ethno-cultural adaptation of internally displaced persons and possible prospects for their solution.

## 6. Findings

Erdogan's statements about the imminent return of refugees to their homeland are also populist in nature. It is unlikely that most of them will return to their homeland in the foreseeable future. And it's not just about the ongoing conflict or their rejection of the Assad regime. Syria, ravaged by a decade-long war, is simply unable to take such a huge number of people back and has nothing to offer them. Even if temporary, but the way out of this situation could be an increase in the demand for refugee labor in the agriculture of Turkey itself. During the urbanization that swept the country, hundreds of villages in various parts of the country were emptied. The rural population of Turkey does not exceed 8 % of the total population of the country. A significant part of the inhabitants of refugee camps could be involved in the development and processing of abandoned fields in return for receiving, albeit temporary, but comfortable housing in comparison with tents and camp huts, as well as stable earnings. This is possible if the European Union grants concessions that would allow Turkey to increase its share in agricultural exports to the EU. In turn, the EU leadership could condition these concessions with mandatory employment of refugees in accordance with the labor standards of the International Labor Organization and the EU. This solution could be equally beneficial for everyone. It would allow refugees to get on their feet, and for Turkey, defuse the growing public discontent and at the same time strengthen their own agriculture.

The resettlement of hundreds of thousands of refugees from camps in border provinces and their dispersed settlement in various provinces would have a calming effect on the population of southern Turkey, who has been extremely tired of their neighborhood for ten years. In addition, it will also remove from the public agenda the real or imaginary threat of *Syrian-Arab separatism* in areas of compact settlement of Syrians. Turkish citizens should also realize that a significant number of Syrians will remain in their country forever. To do this, the government will have to decide to adjust Law No. 2013/6458 *On Foreigners and International Protection*, aimed at progressive co-optation into the Turkish community of the Syrians who most successfully fit into the Turkish realities, up to granting citizenship to some of them. These measures will allow, if not to solve the problem of Syrian refugees in full, then to limit the further growth of mutual tension between them and the citizens of the Republic of Turkey themselves.

## 7. Conclusion

The problem of Syrian refugees in Turkey has been going on for ten years. The state's expenses for the maintenance of refugees are growing, and against the background of the depreciation of the lira and the decline in income in tourism and other services caused by the pandemic, unemployment and inflation have sharply increased, generating rejection of the continued presence of millions of refugees in Turkey. The situation is also aggravated by the ethno-cultural problems existing between Turks and Syrians. The Turkish leadership promises to solve the refugee problem as soon as possible, however, it does not offer truly effective methods to get out of the current situation, which makes it possible to perceive these promises as part of the populist rhetoric characteristic of President R.T. Erdogan.

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